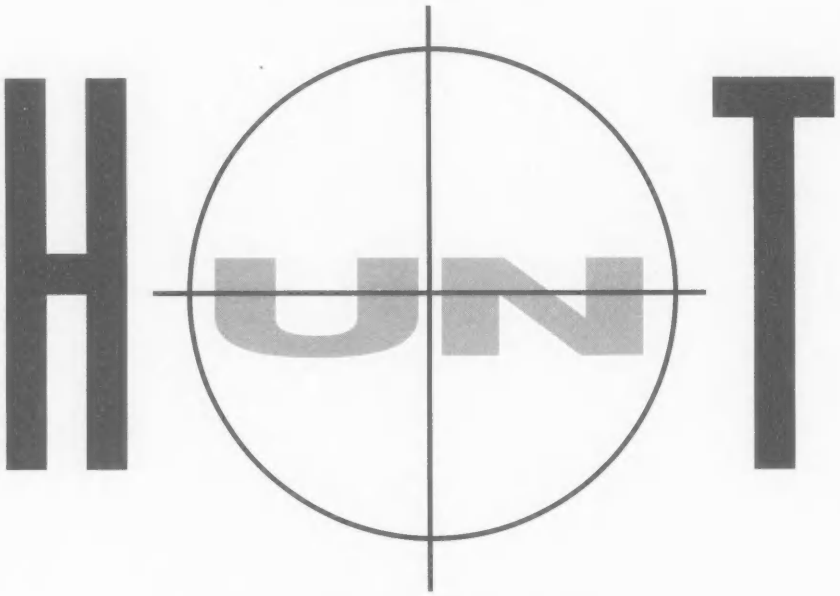
INTERNET HUNT



BY KEVEN M. SAVETZ

WHAT'S THE CAPITAL OF LIECHTENSTEIN? WHAT'S THE PRIMARY RELIGION IN SOMALIA? CAN YOU GET AIDS FROM KISSING? HOW DO YOU SAY "MERRY CHRISTMAS" IN CZECH?

RICK GATES, DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY AUTOMATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA BARBARA, IS ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE THESE IN A MONTHLY CONTEST DUBBED "THE INTERNET HUNT." PARTICIPANTS IN THE HUNT SCORE POINTS FOR FINDING THE ANSWERS TO GATES' QUESTIONS—BUT NOT USING TRADITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIAL LIKE ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND ALMANACS. INSTEAD, HUNTERS MUST FIND THE ANSWERS ONLINE, USING INFORMATION SOURCES ON THE NET.

INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS COMPETE TO FIND THE ANSWERS TO GATES' QUESTIONS. ALL OF THE ANSWERS ARE TO BE FOUND ONLINE USING ANY NETWORKED SERVICE. WHOEVER ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS FIRST, WINS. THE TRUE PURPOSE OF THE HUNT IS NOT TO FIND THE ANSWERS, BUT TO LEARN HOW TO FIND THEM. IT IS A SLY MANEUVER TO MAKE PEOPLE DIVE IN AND MAKE NETWORKED INFORMATION RESOURCES WORK FOR THEM. THE BEST WAY TO LEARN, GATES SAYS, IS BY "GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY."

The first hunt took place in September 1992. The contest has spawned a loyal following, with about 20 entries in any given month. The coveted answers, however, enjoy a much larger readership. "I'd say there are from 200 to 500 users working through the answers that get posted," Gates says.

Gates' idea for the hunt was based on the typical library search assignment from school: "'Here's a set of questions, here's the library's reference collection. Answer these questions. You have one hour.' Some of us enjoyed this type of challenge. We called it 'The Thrill of the Hunt.' I thought, 'Why not try doing something similar with the net?'

"I have a fondness for exploring the net, traversing little-known routes, and discovering valuable information resources. I suspected that others might as well," he says. "The Hunt was an immediate small success. There were a few individuals who enjoyed the challenge, but most net users were interested in getting their hands on the answers. They wanted to see how the explorers found their way around."

Gates thinks The Internet Hunt has accomplished two things: It helps net users realize the enormous amount of information on the net, and it helps novices—whom he calls "settlers"—understand how to move around the "trails" that more experienced users have blazed.

"Where does it go from here?" he wonders. "Your guess is as good as mine. As long as I always have a few players, I'll continue to take the time to dig around and see what new resources I can uncover. There's certainly enough raw material out there."

The Internet Hunt is available on the Usenet group alt.internet.services. You can also Gopher the Hunt at CICNet:
Name=The Internet Hunt
Type=1
Port=70
Path=1/hunt
Host=gopher.cic.net
(The CICNet Gopher is at gopher.cic.net on the main menu.)

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A Sample Internet Hunt

1. (5 points) How does one say "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" in Czech?

2. (6 points) Is the Toyota Motor Corporation connected to the Internet?

3. (3 points) Hi! I have a new account on a Unix machine here, and I HATE the editor I have for my mail. It's called vi. So I found another editor that I can use called emacs. Emacs is supposed to be customizable, but I've managed to screw things up a little. Can you tell me where I can get some advice from more experienced emacs users?

4. (5 points) Can you get AIDS from kissing?

5. (3 points) I read in an electronic journal somewhere that a conference was held in Padova, Italy on models of musical signals. I wrote down the name of a contact, 'Giovanni De Poli.' Can you find his e-mail address for me?

6. (2 points) What is the primary religion in Somalia?

7. (4 points) I understand that the Internet is being put to use distributing information and pictures of missing children. Where can I find out more, and where can I find the pictures?

8. (4 points) Where can I find tables listing the nutritive values of different foods?

9. (3 points) What is the text of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States?

10. (5 points) You know, I've gotten a lot of good network information by FTPing files from nnsc.nsf.net. What kind of computer and operating system is nnsc.nsf.net?